



Partnerships Between Large and Small Cultural Organizations

A STRATEGY FOR BUILDING ARTS PARTICIPATION

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Partnerships Between Large and Small Cultural Organizations

A STRATEGY FOR BUILDING ARTS PARTICIPATION

A small, African-American classical music organization joins forces with a historically black college and gets the space it needs to start a music program for talented, underprivileged teens. A large children's museum with a predominantly white visitorship and staff collaborates with a small, Latino theater and attracts hundreds of Latino community members to events. And, together, a small organization dedicated to promoting African-American culture and a large African-American history museum engage local congregations in a project to collect, preserve, and exhibit church artifacts. In all three of these examples, small and large cultural organizations collaborated with each other to do more than they could have done alone. They are among 10 large-small partnerships supported by The Wallace Foundation's Community

Partnerships for Cultural Participation initiative (CPCP), which provide useful insights for other small and large organizations about the benefits—and challenges—of forming partnerships to enhance cultural participation.¹

Taken together, the results of these collaborations show that partnerships between large and small arts organizations can be a useful tool for building cultural participation. Partnerships can help both large and small organizations expand their networks, horizons, capacities, and audiences.

However, an examination of the CPCP partnerships also reveals that it can be very difficult to create mutually beneficial or sustained large-small partnerships. Partnerships in general are challenging, but issues of mutual respect

¹ This brief highlights and extends a discussion of large-small partnerships presented in a general CPCP monograph on partnerships among cultural organizations. Additional information on research findings, data, and methods may be found in that monograph, *Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310616>.

and relative influence and rewards become all the more sensitive and hard to achieve when collaborators differ so greatly in their resources and culture. The large partners in this research had budgets ranging from \$8 million to over \$40 million—at least 15 times larger than their smaller partners’ budgets. Usually, the disparity was far greater: in about half of the cases, the large organization’s budget was over 50 times larger than that of the smaller partner. By contrast, the largest of the “small” organizations in this research had a budget of \$550,000.

This financial disparity was generally accompanied by other differences, such as staffing and professionalization, audience size, and, in most cases, the ethnic composition of staff, boards, and audiences.

The purpose of this brief is to share the lessons learned from these 10 CPCP large-small partnerships in order to

help cultural organizations recognize and evaluate the benefits and challenges of developing partnerships, and to design and conduct more successful collaborations. Toward that end, it addresses the following questions:

- What cultural participation-enhancing goals can partnerships help large and small organizations achieve?
- What resources can large and small organizations offer one another?
- What are the characteristic difficulties that arise in large-small partnerships?
- What strategies can help large and small organizations initiate, design, and better manage partnerships with one another? ●



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Participation-Building Benefits of Large-Small Partnerships

The Wallace Foundation’s CPCP initiative provided grants to 10 community foundations around the country to help them support efforts by arts and cultural organizations to build participation in three distinct ways: engaging more of the same types of people in cultural activities, deepening the experiences of those already engaged, and attracting new groups of people. Efforts to enhance participation spanned a broad variety of cultural forms and traditions, including ballet and opera as

well as folkloric dance and African-American classical music.

Overall, the results indicate that leaders of cultural institutions should consider large-small partnerships as a strategy to:

- Expand artistic programming and services;
- Engage new audiences;
- Attract artists;

- Engage donors;
- Expand organizational networks; and
- Strengthen staff and internal organizational capacity to conduct participation-building activities.

Partnerships can help small and large organizations address certain characteristic challenges faced by each. For small organizations, partnerships with larger institutions can be part of a growth strategy; help strengthen internal governance, administration, and financial capabilities; and help reach larger numbers of people. For large organizations, smaller partners can help them reach particular audiences they have been unable to reach alone, learn how to build relationships at the community level, and engage in outreach activities that differ from their traditional marketing strategies. Exhibit 1 summarizes the partnerships, including each partner's specific participation goals.

Seven of the ten large-small partnerships were cross-ethnic collaborations in which the larger partner had a predominantly white staff, board, and audience, and the smaller partner had a predominantly African-American or Latino staff, board, and audience. Their experience strongly indicates that partnerships can be a powerful tool for helping large and predominantly white organizations overcome obstacles to diversifying their audiences—a task that many have found very difficult to achieve on their own.² As representatives of the smaller, minority institutions emphasized, however, the partnerships must be mutually beneficial. The mutual benefits of large-small

partnerships are illustrated by the following examples.

◦ **Example: Expanding Organizational Capacity.** A small but fast-growing Latino theater learned ways to strengthen its operations and adapt to growth through partnership with a large theater. The executive director wanted to see how a large theater worked, because, “we’re growing, and trying to minimize [our] mistakes.” As a result of the partnership, the smaller theater hired a professional grant writer (obtained through their larger partner) who successfully brought in grants, strengthened its accounting procedures, and learned how a larger institution uses its board for fundraising. Ironically, however, the Latino theater decided to limit future growth; the exposure was an “eye-opener” that led management to conclude that getting too large would interfere with the theater’s artistic identity and mission. The larger theater benefited as well; the two organizations exchanged mailing lists, which has helped the larger theater’s efforts to attract more Latino audience members.

◦ **Example: Reaching New Audiences at the Community Level.** In the partnership above, the smaller Latino theater sought management expertise. In a partnership with a large children’s museum, however, it *was* the expert. In this partnership the two organizations produced a series of events with food and drink that featured performances by Latino artists to attract more Latinos to the museum’s exhibits. Museum staff knew that to successfully engage

² McCarthy, Kevin, and Kimberly Jinnett. 2001. *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1323/>. Ostrower, Francie. 2002. *Trustees of Culture: Power, Wealth, and Status on Elite Arts Boards*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

EXHIBIT I

LARGE-SMALL ARTS PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CPCP INITIATIVE

Partnership Project	Partner		Resources	Benefits
Bring high school jazz bands to perform in theater run by historical society	Large	Public school system's art programs division	Students; transportation of students to theater	Opportunity for students to perform in a professional setting of historical significance
	Small	African-American historical society that owns and manages a theater	Venue; preparation of theater for performance	Programming for newly acquired theater; advance neighborhood development goals by developing the theater
Create an after-school music preparatory academy for youth primarily from disadvantaged families to provide music training and prepare them for college	Large	Music department of predominantly African-American college	Venue; coaching of academy students	Bring more cultural activities to campus; help rebuild department's string program; provide opportunities for college students to perform
	Small	African-American classical music organization	Staff; students; financing; overall academy administration	Create program they lacked resources to establish alone; expand organization's visibility in area of community where college is located
Outreach and programming activities to engage congregations in collection, preservation, and exhibition of church artifacts	Large	African-American history museum	Venue; curatorial expertise and teaching; ties to churches	Engage museum and curatorial staff in community outreach; audience development
	Small	Organization dedicated to promoting African-American culture	Volunteers; programming for social events produced as part of project; ties to churches	Audience development; expand community ties; space for programming
Produce a living history show at the museum dealing with themes from African-American history and culture	Large	History museum	Venue; staff and financial resources; large visitorship; publicity	Diversify audience; expand programming
	Small	Organization dedicated to promoting African-American culture	Artistic expertise; knowledge of/ connection to the African-American community; ability to do outreach/marketing at community level	Expand programming; reach wider audience; enhance visibility/ reputation with funders; advance growth strategy

(continued)

EXHIBIT I

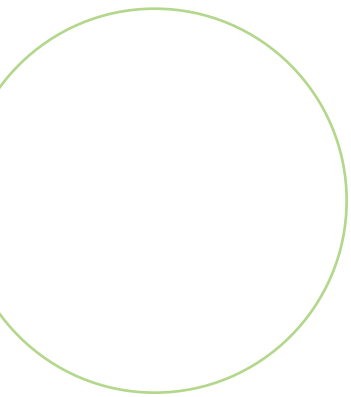
LARGE-SMALL ARTS PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CPCP INITIATIVE (*continued*)

Partnership Project	Partner		Resources	Benefits
Present and commission cultural and educational programming dealing with African-American themes, and engage African-American artists	Large	Arts presenter and an opera house	Venue; administrative and financial	Diversify audience (racially, and for one organization, geographically); deepened knowledge of/connection to African-American organizations and artistic traditions
	Small	Organization dedicated to promoting African-American culture	Audience; connection to African-American community; marketing	Expand programming; enlarge audiences
Audience development and diversification; scholarships for Latino youth in ballet school; assist growth plans of folkloric group	Large	Ballet company	Administrative and financial; school; connections to obtain free dancewear for scholarship students	Access to Latino audiences; diversification of school; new organizational ties in Latino community (including one that became a collaborator in a future project)
	Small	Folkloric dance group and two organizations dedicated to promoting Latino arts and culture	Volunteers; connections to Latino community; access to Latino festival where ballet performed; students for ballet school; access to Spanish-language media	Opportunity to “shadow” ballet’s professional staff to learn about operations of large company; mailing list; complimentary ballet tickets for groups of Latino children
Present events with food and drink featuring performances by Latino artists to attract members of the Latino community to the museum’s exhibits	Large	Children’s museum	Administrative and financial; venue; publicity	Audience diversification; develop ties with Latino organizations and artists; learn how to work at community level
	Small	Latino theater	Knowledge of/ties to the Latino community; ability to do outreach at the community level	Engage in new outreach program; expand audience; raise visibility (e.g., through museum newsletter)

EXHIBIT I

LARGE-SMALL ARTS PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CPCP INITIATIVE (*continued*)

Partnership Project	Partner		Resources	Benefits
Mentorship/partnership to build capacity of small organization; exchange of mailing lists, etc. (not project based)	Large	Regional theater	Administrative, financial, and professional expertise; audience	Audience diversification; mailing list; referrals to other Latino organizations
	Small	Latino theater	Knowledge of/ties to the Latino community; audience	Strengthen capacity to handle growth by learning how large theater functions; strengthen accounting system; referral to grant writer; mailing list
Mentorship/partnership to build capacity of small organization; exchange of mailing lists, etc. (not project based)	Large	Regional theater	Administrative, financial, and professional expertise	Input on educational outreach program; mailing list
	Small	Small theater	Experience in educational outreach	Strengthen organizational administration; referrals to hire grant writer and new staff; attract actors through association with prominent partner; mailing list
Program series combining panel discussions, performances, and literary programs addressing immigration and diversity in the community	Large	History museum	Administrative; historical expertise; community contacts; venue; financial; artistic/program; connection to audience	Engage audiences; expand museum board's knowledge of community and willingness to see arts programming accompany historical exhibits; new community contacts
	Small	Organization dedicated to promoting African-American and Caribbean culture, and an experimental music organization	Artistic expertise; technical expertise (recording performances); connection to artists and ethnic communities	Engage audiences; access to new venues



more Latino visitors, they needed to reach out to the community in a way that was different than their usual “large-scale marketing” approach—but they did not know how to do it. With its partner’s help, programs were developed which reached out to people and organizations in the Latino community (e.g., a Latino staff member was sent to conduct surveys at churches and community organizations to identify and involve local artists). Hundreds of Latino community members attended the events, which included performances by these local artists. The museum also developed new relationships, including one with a local puppetry group that performed in exchange for use of museum space. A museum staff member readily acknowledged that her institution could not have been as successful alone, because the small theater’s director brought expertise and connections that neither she, “a white girl wanting to do this project,” nor the museum possessed.

For its part, the theater director felt the partnership had been a success and helped them do a “great job of outreach.” He also commented that the partnership was a fair one, in which his contributions were acknowledged and respected. The organizations engaged in joint marketing, the museum publicized the theater in its well-circulated newsletter, and, to quote the theater’s director, the museum generally “championed” his institution. He said that the success of this partnership has made him more open to collaboration with “mainstream” institutions: “I think that mainstream and multi-

cultural organizations can learn from each other.”

◦ **Example: Expanding Arts**

Programming. A small organization dedicated to promoting African-American culture collaborated with a large history museum to produce and present a show about African-American history and culture at the museum. The museum entered the partnership to help attract more African-American visitors. Its community-based partner helped them accomplish that goal through its connections and ties in the African-American community. “We wouldn’t have been able to get outreach to churches, libraries, and other community organizations” without their smaller partner, a museum staff member acknowledged.

But the museum also benefited in an unexpected way: by expanding its ability to incorporate the arts into its programming. “[Our partner] kicked us out of our institutional lethargy. . . . They challenged us to think differently. . . . We’re presenting a lot of poetry and music in the exhibit, which we don’t usually do,” according to a museum administrator. The museum will now incorporate more of the arts into its other exhibits. This is particularly interesting because museum staff were initially wary about the compatibility of its partner’s artistic mission and its own historical focus.

The smaller partner, in turn, felt it benefited because the collaboration enabled it to create and present programming on a more expansive scale

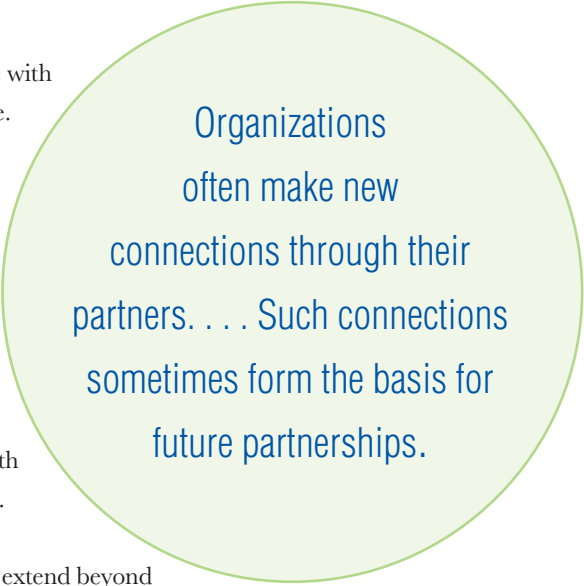
than it had the resources do to alone, reach larger audiences with African-American cultural programming, expand its mailing list, create opportunities for African-American artists, and enhance its own visibility. The executive director explained: “They [the museum] get one-and-a-half million people a year, and if we have the opportunity to tell the African-American story to one-and-a-half million people, and get our name out there . . . it has an impact and raises our identification.”

The above partnerships were all cross-ethnic. But that does not mean that large-small partnerships must cross ethnic lines to yield benefits. The collaboration between the small, African-American classical music organization and the music department of a historically black college referred to at the beginning of this brief helped both partners expand their programs. Using space made available by the college, the smaller organization was able to launch an after-school program for talented but underprivileged teens to provide them with music training and college preparation. Forty students were accepted, performances were held, and “mock auditions” were staged to prepare them for college entrance exams. Notably, all music academy seniors

were accepted to college with some financial assistance.

The college also benefited because the program brought additional cultural activities to campus, helped the department rebuild its string instrument program, and provided college students with opportunities to perform.

Partnership benefits can extend beyond the scope and life of the formal collaboration. Warm relations continue between the small, Latino theater and the larger theater. The head of the small theater borrows props and gets references for lighting designers from his former partner, while the head of the large theater calls him for information about performing groups in the Latino community. Organizations often make new connections through their partners, as did the museum through the Latino theater. Such connections sometimes form the basis for future partnerships, as when a ballet company made “new friends to draw on” in a partnership with several small Latino arts organizations, including an inner-city school that it later turned to when testing a pilot outreach program. ●



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Challenges of Large-Small Partnerships

Partnerships of all types are subject to difficulties, but large-small partnerships pose distinctive problems related to the disparities in participants' resources, culture, and structure. Characteristic challenges of collaborations between large and small organizations include:

- Coordination problems arising from differences in organizational size and culture (e.g., volunteer vs. professional staff, differences in the number and level of staff assigned to the partnership);
- Problems of mutual respect, influence, and benefits (all the more sensitive in cases where the partnership is also cross-ethnic); and
- Strains on the administrative capacities and scarce resources of the smaller organizations from the demands of the partnership.

COORDINATION PROBLEMS

Setting up meetings to coordinate a partnership project between an organization with a large professional staff and a volunteer-run organization can be particularly difficult. For instance, one purpose of a partnership between a ballet company and a volunteer group was to enable the smaller organization's director to "shadow" ballet company staff to see how a large, professionally staffed dance company functions. But he could not take sufficient time off from his job to fully use that opportunity.

Even when all partners have paid staff, discrepancies in staff size can produce frustrations, logistical difficulties, and unequal burdens. Thus, directors of smaller organizations complained that handling different aspects of a partnership required them to meet with several different staff members from the larger organization—and that it was sometimes a challenge just to find out who was in charge. For their part, staff from larger organizations expressed frustration that smaller partners had only one person they could deal with. When that person was unavailable, progress came to a halt.

PROBLEMS OF MUTUAL RESPECT, INFLUENCE, AND BENEFITS

Directors of smaller groups repeatedly emphasized the importance of ensuring that small organizations are treated as full partners. "As a smaller organization . . . the risk is that we might be overlooked," said the head of a volunteer dance company. The director of a group that promotes Latino artists cautioned "that Latinos are 'in' now, and everyone is breaking down the door to attach to Latino things. But most partnerships are not win-win, so you must determine what will benefit the minority partner and not just satisfy the large organization." Both of these directors did feel that their own large-small CPCP partnerships had been "win-win."

Interestingly, a partnership ultimately considered to be most successful by its members was also among the most challenging in terms of negotiating re-

spect, influence, and benefits. The director of the smaller, African-American organization felt he had to struggle hard to establish his organization's equality and get recognition for its contribution. The larger institution, however, questioned why its smaller partner felt it had to be equally involved in everything since it lacked the institutional resources to follow through. Indeed, both organizations felt that they contributed more to the partnership than the other. According to a staff member from the larger organization, "We did more of the work here, involved more people, time, and resources." He said "[The smaller organization] saw this as a 50-50 arrangement. We said, 'Be realistic.' We have 300 to 400 full-time staff, and [they have] four. . . . [The] big-small difference has to have an articulation. Did they have to be 50-50 in everything?"

The head of the smaller organization insisted that "there was a small-large difference, but we're equal. We had to bring them to understand our contribution." He also emphasized that his larger partner could not have conducted the partnership project, which was designed to attract members of the African-American community, alone. "I feel strongly about this," he said. "It was contentious and tough to get peo-

ple to accept that you have something to offer. We know the African-American community and the arts better than they do, but they didn't accept that. So it was always a challenge."

STRAINS ON SMALL ORGANIZATIONS' ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

Partnerships and partnership projects can be costly and time-consuming to develop and maintain. For small institutions, taking on a partnership represents a major commitment since they can only handle a limited number of activities, given their administrative and financial resources. As the head of one small theater explained, "[Our] capacity is so small. If I'm going to develop relationships, then it has to work. I can't waste time. . . . You have to get a sense that both can benefit." The director of one small organization said that grant funds received for a partnership covered less than 60 percent of what the project cost his organization. ●

Partnerships of all types are subject to difficulties, but large-small partnerships pose distinctive problems related to the disparities in participants' resources, culture, and structure.

Meeting the Challenges of Large-Small Partnerships

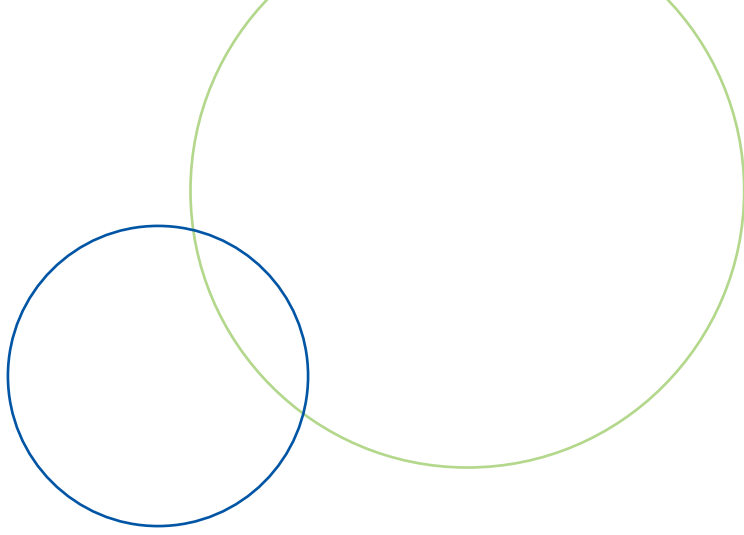
The experiences of cultural organizations in the CPCP initiative suggest useful ways to address the above challenges.

- **Make a frank assessment at the outset of how important the partnership is to each party, where it stands in relation to core organizational priorities, and what (and how much) each is willing to contribute.** Although organizations can benefit from entering partnerships that are outside of their central mission, they should have a clear rationale for doing so and be straightforward with partners about their level of commitment.
- **Plan carefully.** A careful planning process from the beginning, helpful in partnerships generally, is essential for large-small ones, to establish arrangements at the outset that ensure influence, benefits, and mutual respect to all parties.
- **Establish clarity beforehand on partners' respective roles, responsibilities, and rewards.** This will help avoid ambiguity and disagreements later.
- **Confirm at the outset that the partnership and its goals have**

strong support from organizational leaders. A key lesson from the CPCP partnerships is the need to ensure that support comes from the top leadership of both organizations, not just intermediate staff.

- **Realistically assess the partnership's costs, and recognize that grants for partnership projects often do not cover the partnership's full financial costs.** In such cases, partners need to determine whether they are willing and able to cover the balance of required costs.
- **When one organization is volunteer-led and the other is run by paid professionals, a plan should be established at the outset to accommodate the different cultures and schedules.**

These steps may seem basic and simple, but in practice they can be very difficult and time-consuming. Perhaps that is why one or more of these steps were often overlooked, eventually causing problems for all concerned once the partnership project was under way. ●



Conclusion

Are large-small partnerships worth it? Do the possible participation-building benefits for each partner justify the time and resources needed to manage and maintain the collaboration, as well as the contentiousness that often marks the relationships? These are ultimately questions that prospective partners must answer for themselves in light of a careful assessment of their institutional priorities and needs. But the lessons from the CPCP partnerships suggest that if the challenges are squarely addressed, such partnerships can be enormously worthwhile—precisely because they offer a strategy for dealing with some of the most pressing concerns faced by small and large institutions.

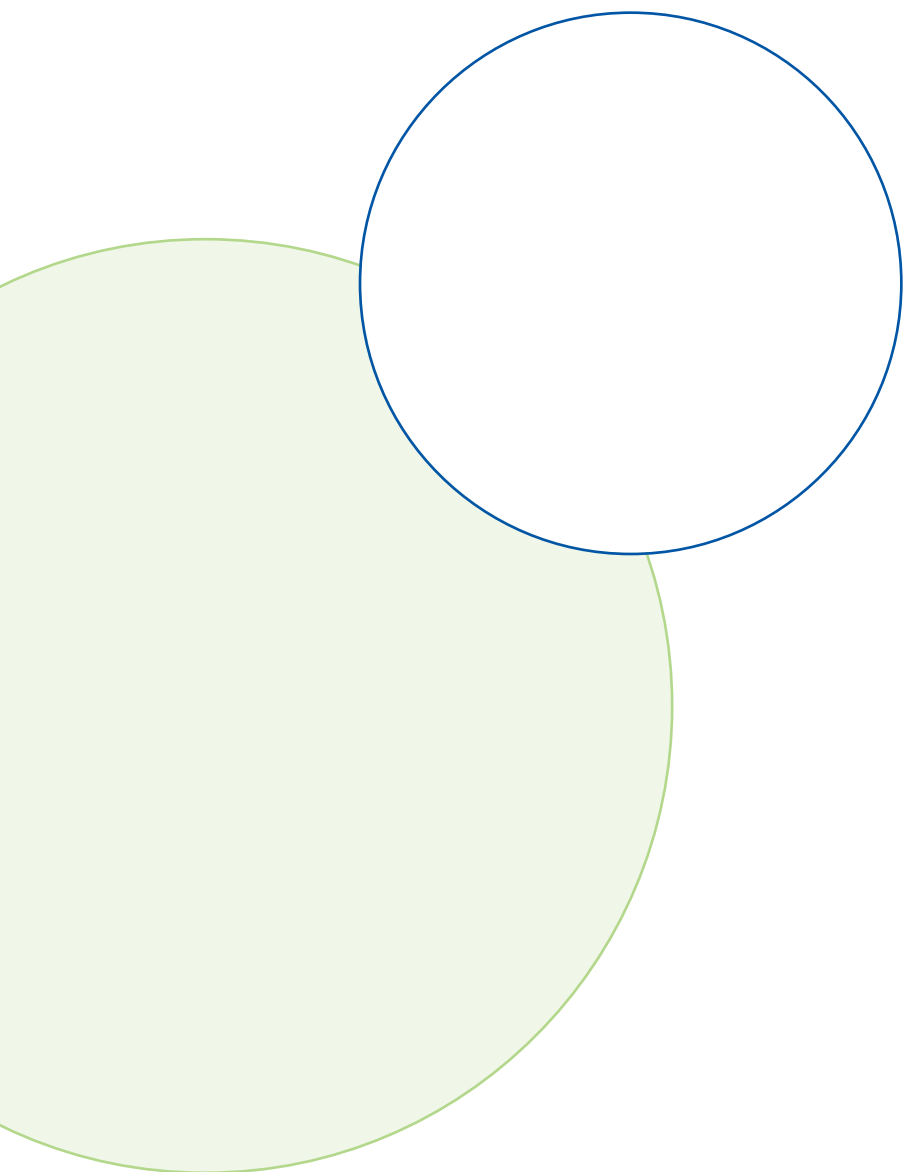
The promise of partnerships between large and small organizations is that they help each to move into new worlds. Perhaps that is why, despite the challenges, the head of one large organization said that his partnership with a group of small, minority institutions was more rewarding than one his institution engaged in with several other large cultural organizations in his city. Through his smaller partners, he said, “we made new friends.” For those who enter these partnerships with a clear sense of the possibilities and challenges, they do indeed offer large and small organizations one option for advancing important cultural participation goals, helping them to cross lines that they could not cross alone.

EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR CULTURAL PARTICIPATION INITIATIVE

In January 1998, The Wallace Foundation commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a five-year evaluation of the CPCP initiative. The initiative is part of the Foundation's long-term commitment to support a range of cultural organizations and private and public arts funders to enhance broad participation and make the arts and culture an active part of people's everyday lives. This policy paper is one of a number of publications from the study, including *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture*; *Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation*; *Arts and Culture: Community Connections*; *Arts Participation: Steps to Stronger Cultural and Community Life*; and *Participation in Arts and Culture: The Importance of Community Venues*. Further publications are planned, exploring the policy and practice implications for building arts participation based on the CPCP evaluation. For additional information on the CPCP initiative or to order or download other publications, visit The Wallace Foundation web site, <http://www.wallacefoundation.org>.

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